

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

news release

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MATAGORDA ISLAND, TEXAS, PROPOSED AS ADDED HABITAT FOR WHOOPING CRANES

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton said today he will request that the refuge for endangered whooping cranes on the Texas Gulf Coast be expanded to include Federal land on nearby Matagorda Island now that the Air Force has declared its aerial gunnery and bombing range there is no longer needed.

During the past three years the Fish and Wildlife Service had a permit from the Air Force to manage part of the island as habitat for whooping cranes which winter at nearby Aransas National Wildlife Refuge but also use Matagorda Island.

The Air Force used land on the island in the past as an aerial gunnery and bombing range but in recent years has cooperated with the Fish and Wildlife Service by suspending aerial activity during the months whoopers were wintering on the Gulf Coast.

Matagorda Island, located near the Aransas Refuge, totals about 51,000 acres of Federal, State, and private property. Most of Matagorda is undeveloped marsh, brush, and grazing land. Part of it represents good feeding and resting habitat for the whooping cranes.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is taking action to acquire only federally owned property from the General Services Administration, the Federal Government's housekeeping agency that disposes of excess property. Morton stated that State-owned properties on the island are not included in the Interior Department's request.

The Fish and Wildlife Service's wildlife management plan for the island will devote primary attention to providing habitat for the endangered whooping cranes, although several hundred deer and healthy populations of turkey and quail reside there also. The management plan also is expected to provide for some public recreational use of the island in cooperation with Texas authorities.

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